

CONGRESSMAN
PATRICK J. KENNEDY
FIRST DISTRICT — RHODE ISLAND



NEWS RELEASE

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**KENNEDY 'OVERWHELMED' BY VISIT
WITH BISHOP BELO IN EAST TIMOR**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Deeply moved by his meeting in East Timor with Nobel Peace Prize-winning Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo, Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy (D-RI) has vowed to step up his efforts in Congress to aid the repressed citizens of the former Portuguese colony.

Kennedy visited the Indonesian-occupied land, attending Christmas Midnight Mass celebrated by Bishop Belo and meeting with the Roman Catholic Bishop on Christmas Day. More than 200,000 citizens, or one-third of East Timor's predominantly Catholic population, have died as a result of the occupation and war by the Indonesian military since 1975.

"Bishop Belo is a wonderful man and the true leader of East Timor. He is filled with peace, love and hope for the East Timorese people," said Kennedy. "The Nobel Peace Prize was not only a credit to Bishop Belo and his work, but it is a symbol of hope for the people of East Timor that the world's attention will now be focused on the human rights' atrocities."

Kennedy, the co-chairman of the House Portuguese-American Caucus, said his visit to East Timor has energized his efforts in Congress to assist the East Timorese.

"I look forward to speaking with President Clinton and my Congressional colleagues to do everything possible to bring an end to these awful human rights' abuses," said Kennedy. "I plan on bringing this issue to the forefront in Congress in the upcoming session."

Kennedy is the author of the East Timor Human Rights Accountability Act, which states that U.S. aid cannot be used to violate the human rights of the people of East Timor. Kennedy also fought for eliminating the International Military Education and Training assistance to Indonesia, an effort he will continue when Congress resumes next month.

"The outpouring of love and joy for Bishop Belo was truly overwhelming," said Kennedy, who arrived at the airport in Dili, the capital of East Timor, with Bishop Belo. Tens of thousands of East Timorese citizens applauded the Bishop, who was returning for the first time after officially receiving the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10.

(2)

Bishop Belo acknowledged Kennedy's visit during his homily at Midnight Mass, where thousands jammed the inside and outside of the cathedral.

On Christmas Day, Kennedy had a 90-minute private meeting with Bishop Belo at his residence. He presented the Bishop with a bronze bust of his uncle, President John F. Kennedy. It was inscribed with a quote from President Kennedy during a speech to the United Nations in 1961 which Congressman Kennedy said was appropriate for Bishop Belo: *"Let no man of peace despair, for he does not stand alone."*

Kennedy said another emotional experience was his visit to the Santa Cruz Cemetery in Dili. In November 1991, Indonesian soldiers shot into an unarmed, peaceful crowd gathered at the cemetery, killing more than 250 people. Videos and reports of the massacre were seen worldwide, in contrast with many prior massacres which were seen only by the East Timorese.

Kennedy also had the opportunity to travel through the streets of East Timor and talk with many of the citizens, and met with officials of the International Red Cross to learn more about their humanitarian efforts.

He also had separate hour-long meetings with two Indonesian officials, East Timor Governor Abilio Jose Osorio Soares and Colonel Mahidin Simbolon of the military.

"As would be expected, they presented a much different picture of the circumstances," said Kennedy. "Obviously, I expressed my deep concerns to them."

Kennedy, who visited Naval sites in San Diego, Hawaii and Japan in his role as a member of the House National Security Committee before arriving in East Timor, is scheduled to arrive back in Washington late tomorrow evening.

(NOTE TO MEDIA: Congressman Kennedy will be available for interviews about his visit to East Timor on Monday, December 30, and Tuesday, December 31. Please contact Press Secretary Larry Berman at 401-729-5600 on Monday to make arrangements. Photographs will also be available).

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